

Norma Winstone/ Klaus Gesing/Glauco Venier *Dance Without Answer*

ECM B0019863

★★★★½

Strictly speaking, this is not a Norma Winstone release. Yes, the cherished British jazz singer with the spacey sense of time and ethereal alto voice is the first name above the title, but here she functions as one corner of a musical triangle.

Pianist Glauco Venier and reedman Klaus Gesing make complete the group. Each can say more

with less, and each is judicious with their respective contributions. The menu of originals and songs from scattered sources (Tom Waits, the Bergmanns, Nick Drake and others) are largely rendered homogenous through the many rubato treatments and elliptical endings; the results are mixed.

Winstone's voice is a pure commodity. Unfortunately, her texts to her songs often float along with little sense of form. She adds a little contour through octave lifts or falls, or a touch of melisma. When Venier's chart on the folksy "Ator Ator" gently lopes with a discernible meter, it's positively vibrant by comparison. Likewise, Madonna's "Live To Tell" is bracing for the elementary chordal mileposts.

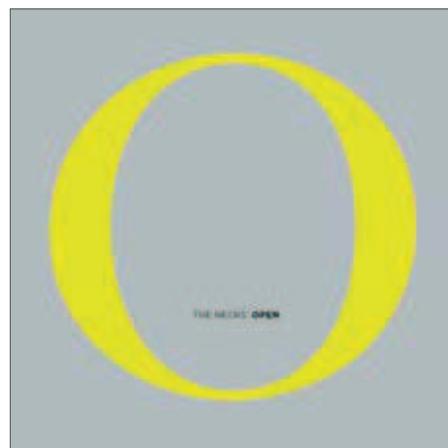
Venier, the accompanist, is a beautiful, reductive extension of Bill Evans through Fred Hersch—gently affirming Winstone here, or suggesting a path there. Similarly, Gesing's contributions are sterling, without a wasted note. His bass clarinet can spread a blanket of color and his soprano sax is unfailingly graceful. When the latter teams with Winstone on "Everybody's Talkin,'" the effect is like two swans taking to the sky. Strangely, though, Winstone ignores Fred Neil's melody and crafts alternate lines that are clearly lesser.

—Kirk Silsbee

Dance Without Answer: Dance Without Answer; Cucurucucu Paloma; High Places; Gust Da Essi Viva; Ator Ator; Live To Tell Music; It Might Be You; Time Of No Reply; San Diego Serenade; A Breath Away; Bein' Green; Slow Fox; Everybody's Talkin'. (59:42)

Personnel: Norma Winstone, vocals; Glauco Venier, piano; Klaus Gesing, soprano saxophone, bass clarinet.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com



The Necks *Open*

NORTHERN SPY 047

★★★★★

For most of its 27 years, this deeply focused trio from Sydney has followed a single, singularly effective modus operandi both for live performances and recordings. One selected member of the trio will play a spontaneous phrase or fragment and the other two musicians fall in, embarking on album- or concert-length improvisations.

Some recordings have featured shorter pieces, such as the group's 2011 album, *Mindset*, but more often than not we get meditative excursions like "Open," all 68 minutes of it. Of course, that methodology might confuse anyone that's never actually heard The Necks—but the group has always been able to take this simple conceit to build majestic, emotionally charged and deeply lyrical epics that transform and shift one bar at a time, all on the fly.

On *Open* there are occasional samples of pre-recorded passages dropped in, but by and large we're only hearing the spontaneous interactions of keyboardist Chris Abrahams (who sticks mostly to piano, but also adds some dreamy organ tones), bassist Lloyd Swanton and drummer Tony Buck. The trio has developed a mind-blowing rapport, one that turns a game of hot potato into a long series of seamless transitions.

At one point Buck plays a soloistic passage on his toms, somewhere between tribal and soothing, over which Abrahams enters with seriously placid, resonant piano figures, while some warm electronic bass-like tone hovers in the background. At other moments, sparse electric guitar floats in, organs swell and electronic sounds flicker.

But trying to annotate a Necks performance ultimately misses the point. The band once made an album for the new-age imprint Private Music, and there's something new-agey about proclaiming that The Necks' music is all about the *journey*—that it's about letting your sensibilities bask in an organic transformation of sound and melody.

It's tempting to analyze the music here, but it's more fun just to ride along. —Peter Margasak

Open: Open. (68:05)

Personnel: Chris Abrahams, keyboards; Lloyd Swanton, bass; Tony Buck, drums, percussion, guitar.

Ordering info: northernspyrecords.com

Lauren Kinhan *Circle In A Square*

DOTTED I RECORDS 1001

★★★★★

Lauren Kinhan's two-decade tenure as a member of the vocal quartet The New York Voices has been widely praised, but her two previous solo albums, *Hardly Blinking* from 2000 and 2010's *Avalon*, hardly made her a household name, despite Grammy-winning producers like Phil Ramone and Elliot Scheiner, and A-list sidemen including Donny McCaslin and Romero Lubambo. Her formidable vocal chops and adroit composing are due for a thorough reappraisal, however, in light of this fine new collection of original songs.

Kinhan certainly might have had an easier path to solo success had she chosen to sing the usual Great American Songbook standards or vocalese. On this album, like the last two, she sings her own idiosyncratic tunes, which defy category and overflow with surprising turns of phrase and melody. While the previous collections emphasized pop and jazz-rock material, she has now made a decisive, ambitious turn toward pure jazz, married to personal, often impressionistic lyrics.

Once again she has assembled a crackerjack rhythm section (Andy Ezrin, Ben Wittman and bassists Will Lee and David Finck) and formidable guests including McCaslin, Lubambo, trumpeter Randy Brecker and saxophonist Joel Frahm, who each contribute to two songs; as well as impressive solos by guitarist Chuck Loeb and accordionist Gary Versace, who supplies the spice on the



disc's sexy tango, "Chaussure's Complex" (it has something to do with shoes). Kinhan executes the most intricate passages flawlessly, whether jumping octaves at high speed on "Vanity's Paramour" or romping through the bebop changes of "Bear Walk." "The Deep Within," a tone poem of spiritual yearning, is a stunner.

—Allen Morrison

Circle In A Square: Circle In A Square; My Painted Lady Butterfly; Another Hill To Climb; Chasing The Sun; I'm Lookin' For That Number; To Live Or Die; Pockeful Of Harlem; We're Not Going Anywhere Today; Chaussure's Complex; Bear Walk; Vanity's Paramour; The Deep Within. (63:49)

Personnel: Lauren Kinhan, vocals; Andy Ezrin, piano, keyboards; Ben Wittman, drums, percussion; Will Lee, David Finck, bass; Randy Brecker, trumpet; Romero Lubambo, Chuck Loeb, guitar; Donny McCaslin, tenor saxophone; Joel Frahm, tenor, soprano saxophone; Gary Versace, accordion; Peter Eldridge, piano; Rob Mounsey, string arranging; Marlon Saunders, Ella Marcus, background vocals.

Ordering info: laurenkinhan.com